

COHESION ELEMENTS AND INTERLANGUAGE IN THE WRITTEN COMPOSITION OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Cohesion is a critical element in writing, especially when it has to do with the acquisition of the writing skill in second language situations where cross-cultural communication strategies are implicated. Nigeria is a typical second language context with colonial implantation of the English language which has dominated the national linguistic landscape as the second language. Most ESL teachers in Nigeria tend to attribute the poor performance of Nigerian ESL in the writing skill to their inability to use cohesive devices well. In order to establish the validity or otherwise of this assumption, the present work drew inspiration from this standpoint to investigate cohesion in the interlanguage of the composition texts of some Nigerian ESL undergraduates using the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as a case study. The study focused on seven major categories of cohesion – pronouns, substitution, co-ordination, subordination, repetition, synonym, and lexical set [collocation]. The classification model adopted is the Gutwinski, 1976 model. Two research questions guided the study. Inferential statistics was used as part of the analytical tools in the study. The investigation revealed the cohesion elements employed by the study sample in terms of categories and frequency. The pedagogical implications of the study were underscored and some recommendations made.

KEYWORDS: Cohesion Elements, ESL–English as a Second Language, Interlanguage, Texts, Composition, Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades or so, many studies in the written English discourse at both English as a Second Language (ESL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), levels have been carried out. Most of these studies have been motivated by the challenges posed by Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The intensity and frequency of errors in the performance of the learners visa-vis the theories that underlie second language acquisition and error linguistics motivated this study. Some of the studies have been motivated by pedagogically driven needs of particular groups of Second Language (L2) learners in the use of longer discourse units in contrast to smaller units such as sentences and isolated syntactic forms, (Na, 2011; Eun & Jeon, 2009; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Hinkel, 2001). Halliday and Hasan's 1976 publication on cohesion generated a lot of interest in studies on cohesion. At the same time, Gutwinski's 1976 model of cohesion appeared with slight differences in the cohesive devices. These models of cohesion provided ways of studying longer discourse units. For Halliday and Hasan, cohesion depends on grammatical and lexical relationships that allow sentence sequences to be understood as connected discourse rather than as autonomous sentences (Na, 2011:744). Gutwinski proposes a model of cohesion within a stratificational framework which focuses on the potential stylistic studies. Interlanguage according to Pit

Corder cited in Jowitt,(1991:52) was introduced by Selinker in 1969 and he subsequently defined it as a separate linguistic system whose existence we are compelled to hypothesize, based upon the observed output which results from the [second language] learner's attempted production of a target language norm". Interlanguage can also be seen as the production of psycholinguistic interaction between two linguistic systems, those of the mother tongue (MT) and the target language (TL). Therefore, this study attempts to identify and analyze the cohesion elements used in interlanguage written texts of ESL learners using ten essays written by ten undergraduates from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The aim is to identify and analyze the types and frequencies of occurrence of cohesion elements used to achieve cohesion in the interlanguage texts and to provide pedagogical implication to help students improve their writing proficiencies using Gutwinski's 1976 model of cohesion. The following research questions guided the study:

- What are the cohesion elements employed by the study population to achieve cohesion in the texts?
- How frequent are the cohesion elements used in the interlanguage texts to achieve textual cohesion?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the literature review in this study is on four major issues which are at the epicenter of this study. These concepts are cohesion, interlanguage, and text.

Cohesion and Cohesion Elements

Cohesion which has gained prominence in second language writing is the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text or a sentence. Linguists observe that sentences can stick together through the use of cohesive devices (Gutwinski 1976 and Halliday & Hasan 1976). The main types of cohesion are grammatical cohesion which refers to the logical and structural rules that govern the composition of clauses, phrases and words in any given natural language, and the study of such rules. The second type of cohesion is lexical cohesion which refers to the language. It is created by repeating the same lexeme or general nouns (Halliday and Hasan 1976, Gutwinski 1976). The following excerpt from *Men behind the Masks* by Orabueze (2010:35) serves as an example of lexical repetition between nouns and pronouns.

Text A

1) **Kate** saw doubts and fear in his eyes and left what **she** was doing and came over to **him**. 2) She touched **him** reassuringly on the shoulders.3) Mr. Okonta these men here are my friends, though I did not tell **you** about their existence in the morning. 4) The business we have at hand also involves **trust**. 5) And **you** can **trust** them as nothing we discuss in this room will be heard outside. 6) So relax yourself, after all, **you** are not facing a panel of judges or a firing squad. 7) Sit down please and let me get a bottle of bear for **you**, **Kate** told **him** as **she** led **him** to a seat where he sat down on the edge quietly".

Table 1

Sentence No	Nouns & Pronouns Repeated
1 & 7	' Kate' is repeated
1,2 & 7	' she' is repeated
1,2 & 7	' him' is repeated
3,5,6 & 7	' you' is repeated
4 & 5	' trust' is repeated

In this text (Text A) of seven sentences, we have fourteen (14) repetition ties formed between nouns and

pronouns. Repetition could be said to have high cohesive constituents in relation to synonyms and antonyms.

The role of cohesion in text is creating the unity of the text. According to Reid cited in Na (2011:746), cohesion devices are ‘words or phrases that act as signals to the reader; those words or phrases make what is being stated relate to what has already been stated or what soon will be stated’. Halliday and Hasan (1976:18) also contend that cohesion exists in the language for making text ‘hang together’: the potential that the speaker or writer has at his disposal. Cohesion is a surface relation; it connects together the actual words or expressions that we can read or hear.

According to Gutwinski, cohesion as a term is used for the relation that exists among the sentences and clauses of a text. These relations, he posits, occur at the grammatical level, which show grammatical and lexical features reflecting discourse structure in texts. These features account for textual connectivity of sentences and clauses. It is this relatedness of clauses and sentences that constitute the internal cohesion of a text. Since cohesion is established as a manifestation of discourse structure, it follows that a text, which is envisaged as a continuous discourse having structure, will display cohesion (<http://docs.ksu.edu.sa>). Gutwinski concludes that texts may exhibit strong or weak cohesion, but there will be no text that does not manifest cohesion. The cohesive features that Gutwinski proposes are categorized into: grammatical cohesion and Lexical cohesion. They include:

Grammatical Cohesion: Anaphora and Cataphora

- Pronouns
- Substitutes
- Coordination and subordination.
- Lexical Cohesion:
- Repetition of Items
- Occurrence of synonyms or items formed on same root
- Occurrence of items from the same lexical set.

Interlanguage

Interlanguage is an emerging linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of second language (L2) who has not become fully proficient, but is only approximating the target language and preserving some features of their first language (L1) in speaking and writing the L2 and creating innovations. Interlanguage refers to a language between two languages, that is, L1 and target language (TL). It can also be an intermediate language that students develop between their native language (L1) and target language or the second language (L2). When they are in the process of learning an L2, they are invariably using a language that is not L1 or L2, but a third language which Selinker termed ‘interlanguage’ in 1969. This interlanguage has its own grammar, lexicon, phonetic rules, and so on. It is based on the theory that there’s a “psychological structure latent in the brain which is activated when one attempts to learn a second language” (Jowitt 1991:52). Some linguists (Selinker and Douglas, 1985 and Jowitt David, 1991) have advanced the theory of interlanguage in various ways. Interlanguage may refer to the English usage of some Nigerians. This is observable at certain educational level. Interlanguage was defined by Selinker, according to Pit Corder cited in Jowitt (1991:52) as: “A separate linguistic system whose existence we are compelled to hypothesize based upon the observed output which

results from the learner's attempted production of a target language norm". Interlanguage can also be regarded as the production of psycholinguistic interaction between two linguistic systems, those of the mother tongue (MT) and the target language (TL) (Jowitt 1991). Crystal (2008:249) defines interlanguage as

[T]he linguistic system created by someone in the course of learning a foreign language, different from either the speaker's first language or the target language being acquired. It reflects the learner's evolving system of rules, and results from a variety of processes, including the influence of the first language ('transfer'), contrastive interference from the target language, and the overgeneralization of newly encountered rules.

Nigerian students develop an interlanguage that reflects the differences between their individual first language and the English language and highlight the specific challenges they face in acquiring English. In the Nigerian context, it may result in Mother tongue (MT) interference. An interlanguage is essentially based on the learners' experiences with the L2. According to Selinker, five processes are responsible for this interlanguage and they are: L1 transfer, Transfer of training, Strategies of second language learning (of simplification), Strategies of second language communication (e.g. do not think about grammar while talking), and Over-generalization of the target language patterns.

Text

Text plays a significant role in communication. People communicate in language not just by means of individual words or fragments of sentence but by means of text. We speak text, we read text, we listen to text, we write text, and we even translate text. Everything one does, such as expressing needs, feelings, transmitting cultures, and so on, whether spoken or written, is done through texts (<http://docs.ksu.edu.sa>). Although nearly all text linguists are in agreement that 'text' is the natural domain of language, they vary in their views on what constitutes a text (Werlich, 1976; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Halliday, 1985; Kress, 1985; Fowler, 1991). This variance is mainly due to the fact that different linguists have observed text from different angles, depending on the approaches adopted. This has resulted in the loose definition of text, which has left it to some extent obscure. A text is made up of sentences and in this study a text is taken as a written essay by an ESL learner.

Empirical Studies on Cohesion and Interlanguage

For the past forty decades, cohesion as a concept has received attention among linguists. This concept put forward by Halliday and Hasan in 1976 and Gutwinski in 1976 has been in existence prior to that time. According to Traugott and Patt cited by Xi (2010:139), the earliest study of cohesion in English was conducted by Jacobson (1960). In 1964, Halliday divided cohesion into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. After this, other relevant cohesion studies surfaced. Some of them included Quirk, Greenbaun, Leech, and Svartvik (1972), Gutwinski (1976), Hasan (1984, 1985) and Hoey (1991).

In China, many scholars develop cohesion theory from different perspectives. One of these scholars is Wang Li (1943) who wrote *Modern Grammar of Chinese*. This was written in Chinese language and provided a detailed analysis of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and reiteration. These cohesive devices were later mentioned by Halliday and Hasan in 1976 (Xi, 2010). It was after this that Chinese linguists realized the importance of cohesion (Xi, 2010; Na, 2011).

In the field of translation studies, scholars conduct a great number of studies on the integration of cohesion with translation studies (Blum-Kudka, 1986; Newmark, 1988; Hatim and Mason, 1990, 1997; Bell, 1991; Baker, 1992; Neubert

and Shreve, 1992; Hatim, 1997, 2005; Xi, 2010). Looking at these, it is clear that cohesion has wide application in different areas. In spite of these, in Nigeria and Africa, not much works have been done on cohesion to the best of the researchers' knowledge. The few works on cohesion were embedded in the actual research works done (Otagburuagu, 1996; Ngonebu, 2000; Akindele, 2011 and Olateju, 2006). These scholars have looked at syntactic and cohesive protocols; cohesive strategies and cohesion in ESL in writing texts respectively. Malgwi looked at cohesion using Halliday and Hasan's model. Other works have been on error analysis of essays and teaching and learning of writing. Our study relates a little with the works of the scholars who have studied cohesive strategies and cohesion in ESL written texts. But this study differs a lot from these other studies in that it will analyze whole essays written by ESL learners, sentence by sentence in order to identify cohesion elements employed by the study population in creating textual cohesion and the frequency of occurrence. This study will therefore add to the growing number of studies on cohesion in ESL writing by focusing on the cohesion elements and frequencies of their use in texts.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study examined ten (10) texts written by ten students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The students were called into one class and an essay topic given to them to write on. They were given one hour to write on the topic given. The raw data were collected and analyzed. Second, to allow the frequency of cohesion elements as an important measure of the study, the essays were analyzed sentence by sentence.

The study which consists of ten (10) texts collected from the study population was analyzed. There were about four hundred (400) words in each text which gave about 4,000 words. Guided by the cohesive devices in ESL written texts, the data collected were analyzed to identify the cohesive strategies prevalent in them. The researchers identified, classified, and analyzed the participants' use of cohesive devices in the texts, using Gutwinski's pattern of determining cohesion in writing. In using this framework, only aspects of the framework that were in line with the purpose of the investigation were employed in the analysis of the interlanguage texts. Here the sentence was used as the basic unit of analysis, where a sentence is used to refer to a unit of meaning in a written prose, which begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop (Nwogu cited in Malgwi 83). The sentences in the texts were numbered serially from the first to the last. The analyst was able to identify the elements in each sentence which perform cohesive functions. A tabular representation was made of the cohesive pattern identified in each 1L text. Information contained in the table will include sentence number, cohesive item, which is classified into: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. The table below shows the type of cohesion elements by Gutwinski used for the study.

Table 1: Types of Cohesion

Grammatical Cohesion
Pronouns (P) Deictic Elements Dominated this Category
Personal Pronouns – he, him, she, it, they, I, you, we
Demonstrative Pronouns – this, these, that, those
Relative Pronouns – who, which, that, whom, whose
Determiners – the, this, there, that, those, a, an, all, many, any, few
Personal Possessives – his, its, their, your, our
Substitute (S)
Verbal – (verb 'do')
Nominal – use of 'one, ones'
Partial – (ellipsis)
Adverbs – there, then

Table 1: Contd.,

Sub modifiers – such, so
Co-ordination (C)
Cumulative of Additive – and, likewise, moreover, in addition, furthermore
Disjunctive – but, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary
Illative – therefore, so, for this reason, then
Subordination (Sb)
Causal – because, since, as, for the reason that
Purposive – that, in order that, so that, lest, for the purpose of
Conditional – if, unless, provided that, whether
Concessional – though, although, in spite of the fact that, notwithstanding that
Comparative – as, than
Temporal – as, as soon as, while, before, until, since, when
Lexical Cohesion
Repetition (R) of whole clauses/ parts of them/ of entire paragraph
Synonym (Sy)/ Occurrence – occurring in two or more adjacent or not too distant sentences
Co-occurrence/ Lexical Set (LS)

The cohesion elements used in this study include the above categories.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Every sentence in each text is examined for a cohesion element. The figure indicating the number of cohesion elements that the sentence has is indicated and then classified into grammatical cohesion (pronoun, substitution, co-ordination and subordination) and lexical cohesion (repetition, synonym, and lexical set). The occurrences of these different kinds of cohesion elements in each text were added up in a table and their relative frequencies obtained and discussed. The cohesion elements in the texts were summarized in Relative Frequency Percentage and the Overall Relative Frequency Percentage. In doing the analysis, we used Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC). LIWC is a text analysis software program designed by James W. Pennebaker, Roger J. Booth and Martha E. Francis. LIWC calculates the degree to which people use different categories of words across a wide or limited array of texts.

Table 2: Overall Summary of Cohesion Elements in the Texts

Sentence No	Grammatical Cohesion				Lexical Cohesion		
	Pronoun (P)	Substitute (S)	Co-Ordination (C)	Subordination (Sb)	Repetition (R)	Synonym (Sy)	Lexical Set (LS)
i	73	12	26	11	21	03	03
ii	66	08	22	21	16	01	10
iii	69	14	14	13	21	02	06
iv	80	09	27	11	09	01	03
v	54	12	08	14	0	01	0
vi	38	07	16	06	08	0	0
vii	45	08	07	07	02	0	0
viii	71	15	41	28	06	0	0
ix	76	12	26	19	0	0	0
x	32	05	12	05	0	0	0
	604	102	199	135	83	08	22

In the above table, the figure at the end of each element stands for the total number of cohesion elements that featured in all the texts.

Pronoun = 604 which gives 52 %; Substitute = 102 which gives 9%; Co-ordination = 199 which gives 17%;

Subordination = 135 which gives 12%; Repetition = 83 which gives 7%; Synonym = 08 which gives 1%; and Lexical Set = 22 which gives 2%. This is illustrated in the pie chart below:

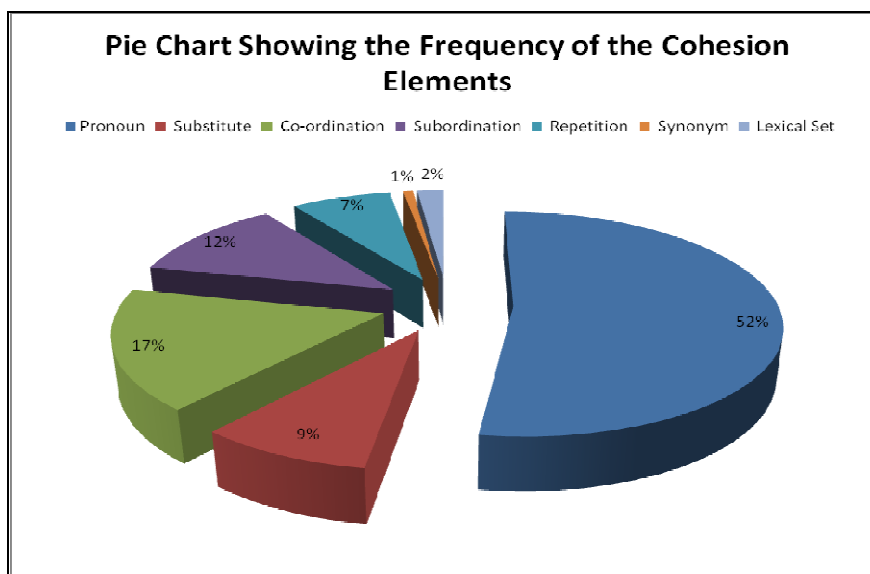


Figure 1

The pie chart showed that pronoun constitutes more than half of the total cohesion elements used. This indicates an overuse of the cohesion element.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study is to identify the cohesion elements used by the ESL learners to achieve cohesion in the interlanguage corpus and to determine the frequency of occurrence of the elements to achieve cohesion in the texts. The cohesion elements identified in the study as used by the learners to achieve cohesion are mainly pronoun, co-ordination, subordination, substitute, and repetition. Synonym and lexical set were sparingly used by the learners. On the frequency of occurrence, it was discovered that the ESL learners in this study, used more of pronouns, co-ordination and subordination. The excessive use of pronouns and limited use of synonym and lexical set in the ESL texts indicates that ESL writing pedagogy needs to focus on using cohesion elements in the construction of texts and avoid overuse of some elements and non-use of others. In order to ascertain the choice of cohesion elements and the frequency of the use in ESL texts, the findings of this study should be confirmed by using a larger sample of ESL writers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends further research on any of the following:

- A replication of the study with focus on other levels of the Nigerian tertiary educational system.
- A comparative study of cohesion, interlanguage and emergent texture in the written English of two or more federal universities either in the same geo-political zone of the country or across geo-political zones.
- The study could also be replicated using another theoretical model.

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